

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BELIZE 00535 241446Z

47

ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 SS-20 NSC-07 AGR-20 EB-11

USIE-00 AID-20 CIAE-00 DODE-00 FDRE-00 HEW-08 INR-11

NSAE-00 PA-04 PRS-01 RSC-01 SCA-01 SWF-02 SCS-03

SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 IGA-02 EUR-25 DRC-01 TRSE-00

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O 240042Z SEP 74

FM AMCONSUL BELIZE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3672

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E.O. 11652: N/A - DECLASSIFIED ON RECEIPT

TAGS: AEMR EAID BH

SUBJECT: SITREP HURRICANE FIFI

FOR AID:PHA/FDRC

1. DEFINITIVE ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE SUSTAINED BY SOUTHERN PART OF BELIZE AS A RESULT OF DIRECT HIT BY HURRICANE FIFI STILL BEING COMPILED, BUT IT IS CLEAR FROM INFORMATION OBTAINED UNOFFICIALLY FROM GOVERNMENT AND BRITISH ARMY SOURCES THAT LOSSES INCLUDE 90 PERCENT OF NEW BANANA INDUSTRY, EXTENSIVE CROP LOSSES AND SEVERE DAMAGE TO POWER AND COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES. (MICROWAVE RELAY STATIONS IN THE AREA WERE BLOWN DOWN AND RESTORATION OF TELEPHONE SERVICE MUST AWAIT THEIR RECONSTRUCTION.)

2. ASSESSMENT EFFORT HAS BEEN HAMPERED BY FLOODING OF STREAMS AND RIVERS IN THE AREA WHICH PERSISTED FOR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER ONSLAUGHT OF HURRICANE AND HAS ADDED SUBSTANTIALLY TO HAVOC WROUGHT BY HURRICANE ITSELF, BY INUNDATING MANY OF THE MOST PRODUCTIVE FARMS IN THE COUNTRY. PRINCIPAL ROADS IN SOUTH

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PAGE 02 BELIZE 00535 241446Z

HAVE BEEN CUT IN SEVERAL PLACES BY WASHED-OUT BRIDGES, AND

DAMAGE TO THE ROADS THEMSELVES HAS BEEN HEAVY, RENDERING SURFACE TRAVEL IN THE REGION EXTREMELY DIFFICULT.

3. BASED ON INFORMATION FROM PREMIER'S OFFICE, OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT WILL CONFIRM THAT DAMAGE TO CORN CROP FROM CARMEN AND FIFI WILL AMOUNT TO 45-50 PERCENT OF NORMAL ANNUAL REQUIREMENTS, I.E., A LOSS OF APPROXIMATELY 5,000 TONS OUT OF AN AVERAGE ANNUAL CONSUMPTION OF 12,000 TONS. HURRICANE CARMEN'S TOLL ACCOUNTS FOR ABOUT HALF OF THIS, AND GOB HAD BEEN COUNTING ON EARLY AUTUMN CROP IN THE SOUTH TO STAVE OFF A DISASTROUS FOOD SHORTAGE. HURRICANE FIFI HAS ELIMINATED THIS HOPE, AND THE RESULTING SHORTAGE IN CORN ALONE CONSTITUTES AN AUTHENTIC DISASTER FOR THIS SMALL COUNTRY. SINCE CORN IS A PRINCIPAL FOOD SOURCE FOR THE RURAL POPULATION, AND SINCE PRESENT STOCKS ARE CLOSE TO ZERO, COUNTRY FACES PROSPECT OF AN EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLY SITUATION. BELIZEANS DO NOT EVEN HAVE SEED CORN FOR NEXT CROP AND HAVE INITIATED EFFORTS TO OBTAIN SEED FROM MEXICO (U.S. CORN IS NOT SUITABLE FOR SEED HERE).

4. GOB REQUEST FOR 500 TONS IS A MODEST ONE IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES AS IT REPRESENTS LESS THAN HALF A MONTH'S NEEDS. IT WILL SUPPLY THE APPROXIMATELY 70,000 RURAL BELIZEANS WHOSE PRINCIPAL FOOD STAPLE IS CORN WITH A RATION OF ONE POUND PER DAY FOR ABOUT TWO WEEKS.

5. SITUATION WITH BEANS, ALSO AN IMPORTANT STAPLE, IS LESS CLEAR CUT, BUT MY INQUIRIES HAVE CONVINCED ME THAT SHORTAGE IS LARGE AND ACUTE. THE AMOUNT REQUESTED (FIVE THOUSAND BAGS OF ONE HUNDRED POUNDS PER BAG) EQUALS ABOUT HALF THE COUNTRY'S ANNUAL NEED. FOR MORE ON BEANS SEE BELIZE 534.

6. IN CASE MY PREVIOUS OBSERVATION THAT THE SITUATION CONSTITUTED A DISASTER WAS NOT SUFFICIENTLY PRECISE, I DECLARE THE EFFECTS OF HURRICANE FIFI ON BELIZE TO BE A NATIONAL DISASTER FOR THIS COUNTRY.

7. INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE IS THAT HMG HAS MADE 140,000 POUNDS STERLING AVAILABLE FOR INITIAL RELIEF AND THAT A FUND IN EXCESS OF ONE MILLION DOLLARS BH CURRENCY WILL BE FORTHCOMING. HMG HAS ALREADY ALLOCATED ONE MILLION IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BELIZE 00535 241446Z

BH CURRENCY AS CONTRIBUTION TO RELIEF FROM HURRICANE CARMEN. EXACT AMOUNT FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE FIFI IS TO BE DETERMINED BY TEAM OF BRITISH AND COMMONWEALTH EXPERTS NOW ENROUTE HERE. WITH HMG RELIEF CONTRIBUTION FOR CARMEN AS PRECEDENT, GOVERNOR'S OFFICE EXPECTS BH CURRENCY COMPONENT OF FIFI RELIEF FUND TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN ONE MILLION BH.

8. BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE AVAILABILITY OF PL 480 TITLE II CORN,

I INTEND TO EMPLOY THE INITIAL DOLS 25,000 AVAILABLE TO ME TO PROVIDE RELIEF IN THE FORM OF CORN TO BE USED FOR FOOD. HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE NEED, AND THE EXTENT OF THE DISASTER, I THINK A DOLS 25,000 CONTRIBUTION WILL APPEAR CONSPICUOUSLY SMALL. I THEREFORE REQUEST THAT THE U.S. DONATE 500 TONS OF CORN (LOWLAND, TROPICAL SYNTHETIC VARIETY) BAGGED IN 100 POUNDS BAGS AND DELIVERED IN BELIZE CITY FOR RELIEF OF THE VICTIMS OF HURRICANE FIFI.

9. I WOULD FAVOR GIVING C.A.R.E. OFFICE HERE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ADMINISTERING DISTRIBUTION OF CORN SINCE THAT ORGANIZATION HAS HAD CONSIDERABLE EXPERIENCE AND CAN SET UP ORGANIZATION AND FACILITIES FOR ASSURING MAXIMUM EFFECTIVE USE OF OUR CONTRIBUTION. I HAVE THE CONCURRENCE OF THE C.A.R.E. DIRECTOR HERE IN THIS PLAN. WE MAY BE ASKED TO PAY SOME ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS, BUT I HAVE BEEN ASSURED THESE WILL BE SMALL.

10. INCIDENTALLY, C.A.R.E. IS PLANNING TO CONTRIBUTE FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR THE EMERGENCY PURCHASE OF SEED CORN FROM SOURCES IN MEXICO. A HITCH HAS DEVELOPED IN PAYING FOR TRUCKING COSTS, AND IF NO OTHER SOURCE OF FUNDS FOR THIS ITEM CAN BE FOUND, I PLAN TO COMMIT SOME OF THE DOLS 25,000 ALLOTTED ME FOR THIS PURPOSE.

11. I EXPECT TO BE SEEING PRICE THIS WEEKEND IN CONNECTION WITH KILDAY VISIT, AND IT WOULD BE GREATLY APPRECIATED IF I COULD HAVE AN ANSWER TO THE ABOVE REQUEST BY THEN. GAWF

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